BRADING VILLA:
A PHOENIX RISES IN THE LAND OF VECTIS

by David Tomalin

Laid before the questioning eye
The uncovering and displaying of a Romano-British building beneath a purpose-built cover building has always presented a paradox. While it is unwise to emulate the old it can be equally imprudent to superimpose the new. The quaint slate-roofed closets for the Aldborough mosaics, the rustic thatched cover buildings at Bignor, the two-tiered viewing platforms at Lullington, the bold sixties pre-cast concrete at Fishbourne, the courageous open-air presentation at Littlecote; each design proffers an appeal that seems typecast in its own era.

Viewing Vectensian villas
Surprising, the tiny island of Vectis (Isle of Wight) has four Roman villas that have struggled to remain in the light of day. An early and miserable failure was the aisled building at Carisbrooke. This still attempts to peep through the undergrowth of a vicarage garden. Donors, assisted by Dr. Ernest Wilkins, the Curator of the Isle of Wight Museum, rallied to construct a cover building here in 1859. The project was betrayed by a disingenuous vicar who feared an invasion of his privacy. Having announced that he would be carrying out the protective works himself, the vicar left the painted walls of the villa to the winter frosts and snows. In the following spring Dr. Wilkins was quick to comment that the 'genius of destruction is swift and sure'.

In 1872 the Royal Archaeological Institute accepted the vicar’s offer to dine on the lawn of the vicarage. At the same time the Institute declined the offer of the museum curator to view the antiquities rescued from this villa and other Island sites. This time it was the response of the curator that was swift and sure. In the week of the Institute’s visit, poor Dr. Wilkins committed suicide.

The next island villa building to be laid bare was the bathhouse at Combley. This was uncovered in 1911 when the excavator took the unusual step of reburying many of the small-finds in a large biscuit tin. This tin was discovered when the site was re-examined in the 1970’s. This time the villa was marked out on the ground after re-burial.

A third villa, at Newport, presents a more rewarding story. An enthusiastic property developer erected a concrete cover building here in 1926. In 1964 the Isle of Wight County Council reluctantly adopted this building. Ten years later the cover building displayed a revealing array of 38 broken window panes. Inside, some interesting fenestrae were well rooted in the Roman fabric. Today, the villa is much changed and it now presents a remarkably informative and evocative tableau of reconstructed Roman rooms. These are to be found in a winged corridor house that modestly hides itself amongst suburban gardens.

We now come to the Island’s largest Roman building and the fine mosaics at Brading. Unearthed in 1880 this villa was partially covered by sheds before receiving its first effective cover building in the opening decade of the 20th century. The purchase of the site and the cost of the first protective sheds were met by the Lady Louisa Oglander.

The Oglander cover building was a large steel-framed agricultural structure clad in endearing corrugated iron. The perimeter of this building sat almost on the edge of the Roman walls yet the interior was just large enough to provide for the basic needs of an annual train of

Fig. 1. The Oglander steel cover building erected around 1909. (In 2003 it was cut down to two metres to become a temporary cocoon). In the foreground an evaluation trench cuts the footings of the south range.

Photo: © Brading Roman Villa.

Fig. 2. G. Soffe, E. H. Hibberd, B. Waiters and D. Tomalin inside the old cover building in 1996.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.
some 20,000 visitors. The attraction was the fine array of individual figured mosaic panels crammed in three particular rooms.

**Crisis at Brading**
In 1994 the Brading mosaics were damaged by severe flash floods. This occurred after downslope ploughing had channelled rainwater to make virtual swimming pools within some of the villa rooms. On the advice of English Heritage, a new registered charity, the Olander Roman Trust, was promptly formed. By 1996 a condition report and a conservation plan were in the hands of the new trustees. These showed that the floodwater had introduced iron oxides and fertilisers into the fabric of the villa. Staining was severe and the grout of the mosaics had been chemically altered. Expansion of the grout was now causing the mosaics to rise, bubble and blow. A survey by ground-scanning radar was commissioned. Soon the news worsened. A structural survey showed that the iron stanchions of the cover building were rusting at ground level. A life of no more than six years could now be expected for the Edwardian cover building.

Since the black news of 1996 the new Trustees of the villa have been extremely busy. With the encouragement of English Heritage they have been negotiating, advocating and cajoling support for a new cover building and interpretative centre. This plan sought a sustainable future for the long-admired mosaics. This has been no mean task because the island is insufficiently populated and resourced to readily accomplish such a project. Local unemployment is surprisingly high yet the Island community is largely ineligible for European structural funding. Inclusion in the seemingly prosperous south-east region of England can be a further impediment for this anomalous offshore community. On the mainland, the cultural heritage of the Isle of Wight can easily seem obscure or remote. This can certainly weaken any appeal laid before potential sponsors.

**Designing a cover building for the 21st century**
First estimates identified a cost of £3.5 million for a new cover building at Brading, but this was deemed too much for a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Parings and economies eventually trimmed this to £2.8 million. The final plan focused on the protection of the monument while allowing that the development of museum facilities might need to be deferred to a possible second stage. The issue of sustainability was keenly examined by the Heritage Lottery Commission. Stay time needed to be extended and opening times should be maintained throughout the year. To win further support from visitors, an education room and a shop and restaurant facility were essential.

The brief for the new building encompassed the following key design issues.

1. The building must preserve the *in situ* archaeology of the Roman house.
2. There must be shallow foundations to minimise the footprint impact of the new structure.
3. The environment of the exposed Roman remains must be stabilised.
4. The process of visitor flow must be suited to the interpretation of the site.
5. The project must fall within a viable cost.

Fig. 3. The phoenix rises. April 2004. The cut-down Olander building is still inside the new structure and awaits final dismantling. Left, the new circular earthwork is a schools’ open- air theatre, modelled by the digger driver from excess spoil. Photo: © Brading Roman Villa.

6. The aesthetics of the new building must be suited to character of the site and the needs of the surrounding Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The architects who have fulfilled this brief are Rainey, Petrie, Johns, an Island practice who, over the last decade, seem to have established a distinctive suite of public building that appears to present a distinct ‘Vectensian’ style.

**Securing a strategy for survival**
Early in 2003 the Heritage Lottery Fund announced its support for a rescue package agreed with the Trustees. This comprised the construction of a D-shaped cover building, a reception area, a restaurant, an education room and ‘rest’ facilities. To avert unnecessary disturbance of below-ground archaeology, the foundations would be carried by cast ground beams set between principal load-bearing pads. There would be 64 of these pads and each would be archaeologically dug.

To carry out this work the Trustees engaged KT Archaeological Services. The contract also accommodated voluntary work by members of the Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeological Society. This arrangement was recognised to be vital to the villa’s long-term sustainability. Where the villa had formerly been protected by the personal generosity of the Olander family, a new ethos of local ownership and responsibility was
now needed. It was also recognised that, within the dynamic of English south-coast seaside communities, entertainment enterprises might come and go through natural wastage, but a Roman villa would need sustained local support, particularly in the winter months. Without this, the wellbeing of the villa could still founder.

Pre-emptive excavations
In August 2002 the archaeological team and the groundworks contractors arrived on-site. Pre-emptive excavations began within the foundation footprint of the new cover building. This also included a detached Roman structure known as 'Building 31'. This structure lies at the rear of the winged corridor house and occupies a position that might, arguably, be compared with a shrine or mausoleum.

Immediately north of the villa house a great spread of rubble was found. Kevin Trott and his team promptly recognised this to be the collapsed gable end. The outline of this rubble now suggests that the fourth-century villa house had been just capable of accommodating an upper storey at dormer level.

The new excavations show that the villa ‘courtyard’ or ‘precinct’ wall was a substantial one. For the first time since 1880 there is new evidence to date some of the principal building phases of the villa. This suggests that the earlier occupation was centred on the aised house in the north range and that the winged-corridor house and the walled precinct were erected during or after the late-third century.

Presenting and sustaining a Roman villa in a changed educational environment
The new cover building, with its grass sedum roof and D-shaped plan is certainly innovative. Re-appraisals of the mosaics are also surprising for it seems that as a maritime villa, Brading claimed far reaching links with the Eastern Empire where contemporary fourth-century politics were to evoke lampoonery in the imagery within the villa’s floors.

Some ARA visitors may be surprised, or even alarmed, to discover that many of the interpretive panels in the new display are presented in the format of a first person narrative. The largest single category of visitors is Primary and Middle School children. New researches have proffered a possible name of the villa owner in the mid-fourth century. It is through text and sound that we are now greeted by this man. (Hanworth, 2004, reveals his name!).

Will the new cover building succeed in reconciling conservation and presentation with the practical requirements of meeting the interests and educational needs of
visitors in the 21st century? The architects, the engineers, the conservators and the museum advisors have all played their part but how will the villa fare against those capricious little zephyrs that waft through the National Curriculum to whisk vital school visits away from Roman Britain and into that arid desk-bound environment where textbook studies of Vikings, the Indus valley and the ‘Wild West’ have become Government’s prescription for the day? A cloying web of financial and administrative impediments has also been laid to ensnare every school bus or coach that ever attempts to set forth on a practical field visit. The future for museum visits and field studies has never been so bleak.

Through the work of Government’s Qualification and Curriculum Authority (the QCA), will the advance of politically correct topics in history now press Roman Britain towards the same ignominious fate as British prehistory or the historic landscape?

In the classroom a natural curiosity for prehistoric and Roman discoveries abounds, yet educational use of these captivating resources may cut little ice in an OFSTED inspection.

When potsherds or metal artefacts are brought by young discovers to the classroom, the dynamic for investigation, measurement, theory-testing, discussion and experimentation is naturally set. Is it now a teacher’s task to implicitly downgrade or dismiss this curiosity while redirecting each class to a bleak and insensitive list that befits only an accountant’s comprehension of achievement targets, ‘service delivery’ or ‘performance’?

Could it be that the islanders of Wight have nobly undertaken a vital heritage protection project at the very time when Government seeks to drive the final nail into the coffin of British archaeology? After all, despite its undeniable propensity to evoke and inspire all manner of latent investigative and reasoning skills, archaeology has been consistently denied even a modest foothold in the history syllabus of our schools. In this particular arena, it would be reassuring to know whether our primary heritage agency is
succeeding in persuading Government of the educational significance of those of our monuments that are truly ancient.

While colour drains from our past
With school museum visits and field excursions undeniably down, it would be reassuring to know whether an interdepartmental discussion has yet been brokered at Government level between those who manage and curate our ancient monuments and those who carry the awesome responsibility of explaining the history of our national landscape to the emerging generation. Perhaps the graffiti ‘tags’ in our cities should be recognised as a direct cri de cœur from those who have been denied any clear vision of a rich and varied cultural landscape and their position in it?

With a denial of statutory support for local authority museums, the prospect for provincial archaeological collections and site museums has never been so bleak. This makes a project such as Brading Roman villa something more than a mere experiment in site management and conservation. This brave new building has already become an acid-test of Government’s commitment to the historic environment. The Heritage Lottery Commissioners and English Heritage may pump-prime with largesse, sponsors may proffer chequebooks, children may reach for their notebooks and seasonal visitors may vote favourably with their feet; yet in the next few years it will probably be the Qualification and Curriculum Authority that decides the destiny of sites like Brading and its mosaics. Surprisingly, this decision may be taken in a round of tinkerings where no-one actually recognises the magnitude or impact of the effect on or below the ground.

Reference:

ALCHESTER – VESPASIAN’S BASE DISCOVERED?

by Eberhard Sauer

Few issues in Romano-British studies are as controversial as the Roman invasion of Britain. Scholars cannot agree whether the invasion army landed in Kent or on the central south coast, whether or not there was much resistance in the south-east, whether there were numerous Roman forts (one at more or less every road junction), or just a few strong bases.

One of the few things agreed upon was that Vespasian, who was in charge of the Second Augustan Legion – one of four such elite units involved in the invasion – operated mainly between Dorset and the Isle of Wight. His legion, was thought to be based in this area or, at least, no further north than Silchester.

An unexpected discovery of an inscription provides us with his biography, the first personal life story we know of, of anybody living before the Middle Ages in what was to become Oxfordshire:

‘Dis Manibus/ L(ucius) Val(erius) L(uci[i] f[i]lius) Pol(lia tribu) Gem(ius) For(o) Germ(anorum) / vet(eranus) Leg(ionis) II Aug(ustae) an(norum) L(hic) s(il(uis) e(st)/he(res) c(uravit)/ e(x) t(estamento)’

‘To the souls of the departed: Lucius Valerius Geminus, the son of Lucius, of the Pollia voting district, from Forum Germanorum, veteran of the Second Augustan Legion, aged 50(?), lies here. His heir had this set up in accordance with his will.’

These few lines tell us more about his life than one would expect at first sight. Lucius Valerius Geminus had been born in a small and marginal community in north-west Italy, called Forum Germanorum. On the basis of our knowledge of the recruitment of other legionary soldiers at this time, it appears that he joined the legion probably aged between 17 and 25, and retired after Rome had invaded

Fig. 1. The tombstone (the scale is 3 x 100 mm). Photo: © Eberhard Sauer.
and subdued two most powerful tribes and the Isle of Wight. Lucius Valerius Geminus would have been one of some 5,000-5,500 soldiers of the Second Augustan Legion who bore the brunt of this heavy fighting. The fact that the only two officers we know to have served under Vespasian during the invasion both received military decorations, adds further strength to the impression that the Second Legion's conquest of territory in Britain had been no walkover (even if there is some debate about how meaningful such honours still were at the time). When he retired, Lucius Valerius Geminus could look back on an eventful life. Why did he not return home to Forum Germanorum, where he had grown up in or near the foothills of the Alps? After 25 years or more in the army, many people he had known in his youth would have been dead, others strangers to him. By contrast, the majority of his comrades would have settled down at the base as well, and he may have had a partner and even children there.

But can we be sure that Alchester was his base? Could he not have died on a journey? If this were the case, it is unlikely that his tombstone would have been placed at Alchester. A family tombstone from Caerleon, for example, was set up for a soldier who had died on an expedition to Germany, and for some of his closest relatives. Whether his ashes were brought back to Britain, or whether he was just commemorated here, it was obvious for the dedicatory, his sister, that her brother should be remembered at her domicile, which she had once shared with him. There can be little doubt that the heir or heirs of Lucius Valerius Geminus would equally have been the person(s) closest to him. Undoubtedly, they would equally have erected the epitaph near their, and the veteran's former, residence, especially in the light of the expensive provisions in his will.

Thus Alchester was, with a high degree of probability, the base of the Second Augustan Legion. It ought to be stressed that the defences of the postulated main fortress have not yet been found, but it seems likely that large sections of them were expanded and destroyed to create a wide ditch around the later town. Furthermore, if the western compound was part of a fort or fortress, then we should have found its ditches running east or curving north in trench 42 (Fig. 5). That we did not, suggests strongly that the western compound was an annexe to a fortress under the town. The military double granary further south, and unlikely to have been built outside the defended perimeter, provides a further strong indication that the remarkably rectangular civilian town was built over an abandoned fortress. Including its annexe, it is only marginally smaller than the legion's later base at Exeter and thus could have housed the whole legion. Two identical tree-ring dates of October AD 44 to March AD 45 (ARA 13, 2002: 3–5) from the annexe gate prove that the annexe was constructed at the end of the second annual campaigning season of the invasion army. The main fortress is likely to be earlier and dates probably to the first season, following the invasion, in AD 43. While we do not know precisely when Vespasian departed from Britain, it is commonly thought that he stayed until c. AD 47. In the light of the number of his reported military
engagements, it is indeed unlikely that he would have left much earlier than that. The Alchester fortress was thus, undoubtedly, in existence whilst Vespasian was in charge of the legion and, most probably, provided his winter quarters for his entire term of office in Britain.

Can we be sure that Alchester was Vespasian’s base on the basis of no more than one inscription? We cannot be absolutely sure, but it is worth stressing that all other certain tombstones of legionary veterani, 12 in total, come from the military bases of their former legion or veterans’ colonies. (The emeriti, incidentally, are probably not the same category of ex-soldiers.) Some simple probability calculations suggest that the chances that Alchester could be the only known exception to the rule are less than one in ten. This does not even take into account that not a single base, large enough for a legion and datable to Vespasian’s term in office, has been found anywhere in south-west Britain: the only bases large enough are the fortresses at Lake Farm in Dorset and Exeter. The coin spectrum from Lake Farm, where issues of Caligula (AD 37-41) have already disappeared from circulation, is distinctively later than that from Alchester and other early sites (such as Hod Hill), where coins of Caligula are about as frequent, or more frequent, than those of Claudius (AD 41-54). We can thus be sure that the foundation of the Lake Farm fortress post-dates Vespasian’s departure. Exeter, indeed a later

base of the Second Augustan Legion, was not established before the mid to late AD 50s at the earliest. There is no evidence for military structures at Dorchester in Dorset or Silchester; the presumed military headquarters building at Silchester is now thought to be civilian. At Chichester coins and equipment prove a military presence in the AD 40s, but there is not enough structural proof for a permanent base.

Other alternatives to Alchester being Vespasian’s base seem equally unlikely. Could our veteran have been a member of a minor detachment of the Second Augustan Legion posted here? However, not a single other former member of a detachment is known to be buried at a non-legionary base in Britain. Not one, for example, is later attested on Hadrian’s Wall, despite extensive legionary deployment in the northern frontier zone. This strongly suggests that the posts of smaller, or short-term detachments were not places at which legionary veterans normally wished to spend their retirement. They would have much rather returned to their former bases or colonies. Furthermore, the Alchester fortress with its annexe, being almost as large as Exeter, is far too big for a minor detachment. If we

Fig. 4. One of the two tree-ring dated gate posts of AD 44, proving that Alchester had been occupied whilst Vespasian was in charge of the Second Augustan Legion. Note the substantial void above the gate post, visible as an imprint in the profile, where all timber has already rotted. Photo: © Eberhard Sauer.

Fig. 5. Plan of Alchester in the prehistoric and early Roman military period. © Eberhard Sauer.
assumed, however, that half of the legion was at Alchester plus, perhaps, some auxiliary units, where was the rest? Not only has no contemporary fortress been found to date south of the Thames, but Vespasian could not have been in effective control of a legion split into excursions stationed days apart. Should we continue to search, maybe in perpetuity, for the elusive postulated, but as yet undiscovered, main base of the Second Augustan Legion near the south coast? Is it not much more likely that the legion’s headquarters were at Alchester, a fortress of the right size, date and, unlike all other postulated bases of Vespasian, with firm evidence for the legion?

If we examine the evidence for the alleged presence of the Second Augustan Legion near the south coast, the hypothesis that it must have been based there collapses. We know that Vespasian took part in the invasion army’s march on Colchester. Yet, other than that, only one specific place name in any ancient source informs us about his operations: according to Suetonius, he had taken the Isle of Wight. It is not at all improbable that the invasion army had originally landed near this island and captured it then. This would also explain why an island with a relatively small area of territory was considered worth mentioning at all. Should this be true, then the island’s location does not provide any clue about

Vespasian’s whereabouts after the fall of Colchester. If, however, the invasion army had landed elsewhere, and if the Isle of Wight was taken only some time after Colchester, it still would have been perfectly within the reach of a legion stationed at Alchester.

Should we still believe that Vespasian conquered Hod Hill and, possibly, other hillforts of the Durotriges? (Whether Maiden Castle and South Cadbury were taken in the AD 40s, or when crushing a revolt a decade or two later, is uncertain.) Though no longer certain, this is still perfectly possible. In the light of the lack of evidence for any other legion, or any legionary fortress south of the Thames, and Suetonius’ emphasis on the number of native strongholds captured by Vespasian, it is still a strong possibility. The garrison left on Hod Hill, however, need not have included legionaries; against common opinion, the so-called ‘legionary equipment’ found there could have been worn or used by auxiliaries as well, as it is found in small, probably auxiliary forts and even provinces without a legionary garrison. The client kingdom of the Atrebates may have played some role in securing the western flank of territories under Roman hegemony as well, in addition to Roman garrisons, such as on Hod Hill. If Vespasian’s summer campaign had indeed extended to the territory of the Durotriges, as, even if unproven, it is still tempting to assume, then the
sheer geographic range of Vespasian's operations could help to explain why he gained such a strong military reputation. Vespasian's military credentials must have been one of the reasons why Nero put him in charge of the forces to crush the Jewish revolt in AD 66, besides, of course, his comparatively humble origins, so that he was not considered a threat to the emperor. Yet, it was only three years later that the man, who probably a generation earlier had had his headquarters at Alchester, became emperor himself, ruling for ten years. His sons, Titus and Domitian, were in power for another 17 years. It is even possible that Titus, born in AD 39, would have spent some time with his father at the base, as the young Caligula had done with his father, Germanicus, in Germany and Syria. This, however, has to remain a matter of speculation, and we know that Titus was brought up, at least for parts of his childhood, in Rome. That his father, Vespasian, had stayed at Alchester for some time, is, by contrast, not just a possibility, but a strong probability.

**Alchester at risk**

Alchester is a unique site in many ways. While this article is mainly devoted to the longest Latin text from Roman Oxfordshire and the insights it provides into the history of the Roman conquest, the site has yielded other superlatives. It appears to be earliest establishment in Britain with a flowing water supply. It has furnished us with the earliest Roman tree-ring dates in Britain and the only waterlogged *tilia* (probably pointed stakes functioning as the ancient equivalent to a minefield) in the Roman Empire. Mark Robinson's analysis of the plant remains has led to the discovery of parts of the earliest specimens of four plant species in Britain: celery, coriander, millet and the cones of the Mediterranean stone pine.

![Diagram of the defences at the annexe gate of AD 44](image)

*Fig. 10.* Alchester's sophisticated defences, here at the AD 44 gate, include pointed stakes driven into the ground as the ancient equivalent to a minefield: an indication that the invasion army was prepared for an organised attack on their base. The defences at the annexe gate of AD 44.

**Fig. 9.** Waterlogged wood is still exceptionally well preserved in some deposits at Alchester, such as here in a ditch terminal next to the AD 44 gate.

**Fig. 11.** One of the vertical stakes *in situ*, probably once sharpened, similar to examples, called 'tilia' and described by Caesar (De Bello Gallico 7.73). They were intended to severely wound the feet of enemies crossing the line between the access road to the annexe gate and the military ditches.
have been produced in every fort and fortress. There is a high probability, rather than just a random chance, that Alchester's still extensive waterlogged deposits contain texts written on wooden tablets. These would be the earliest handwritten documents from the British Isles, which could provide unique insights into the Roman conquest of southeast Britain. It may also be possible to determine the precise date and season of the establishment of the main fortress, if posts from one of its gates, or of structures within it, could be located. That there is further unique evidence for plant imports, diet and the environment, is beyond doubt.

Unfortunately, some of this extraordinary evidence is at an acute risk. Only the bottom seven to nine inches of bark survived on the AD 44 gate posts, and even there it was already damaged. Its loss would have made precise dating impossible. A further drop in the water table, even if just temporarily, could wipe out Britain's most important waterlogged archive for the Roman invasion of Britain in a short period of time. Significant quantities of waterlogged wood have already been above the water table in recent summers. We also observed substantial voids above all gate posts. They still bore the imprints of the tree trunk sections, which have now completely rotted away, probably in the recent rather than distant past, as the voids have not yet collapsed. Voids, where pointed stakes have been driven in the gravel, have equally been recorded. Nearby road works in the 1990s, drainage and climatic change could all have had an impact. And while it is impossible to date the voids precisely, it seems likely that the damage occurred in recent years or decades. According to the Meteorological Office, 2004/05 saw the driest November to June period in England since the drought of 1975/76. There are thus no grounds for confidence that Alchester will be safe in future.

What is at stake? Not just Vindolanda, but a series of early imperial military sites have yielded writing tablets from waterlogged deposits. Such documents would and careful excavation should continue for a few more years at least. Once the remainder of Roman Britain's earliest plant remains, timbers and, probably, documents vanish in a hot and dry summer, as they almost inevitably will, at least a sample of them will have been rescued for future generations.

For further information see Britannia 36 and the Oxford Journal of Archaeology 24.2 – 2005.

Acknowledgements

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A volume once invariably found on the shelves of archaeologists and students of Roman Britain was the 1969 revised edition of Collingwood and Richmond’s famous handbook *The Archaeology of Roman Britain.* It is subtitled: *with a chapter by B. R. Hartley on Samian Ware.* This one chapter demonstrated to the ordinary field archaeologist of Britain and neighbouring Roman provinces the importance of the type of pottery known as *terra sigillata* or samian ware. The development of the history of the Roman Empire and particularly Roman Britain owes a great debt to its author for his unique specialist knowledge and research. Brian Hartley showed that for the student of Roman Britain, samian has a twofold importance. “Trade in it was undoubtedly a significant factor in the economy of the province, where it serves to some degree as an index to the progressive demands of Romanization.” He also maintained that it is the most potent single source of dating evidence for sites occupied during the first and second centuries. The red-coated table-ware was imported into Britain on a vast scale, chiefly from large factory sites in three areas of Gaul (Figs. 2 and 4). Many of the vessels were stamped with their makers’ names (Figs. 3 and 4) and the close study of these stamps makes it possible to date the manufacture of most samian ware to within 25 years. Although samian can have a long currency in circulation, it is better for dating purposes than any other ceramic in the western Roman Empire. Brian Hartley showed that its wealth of variety in the decoration and the potters’ stamps, could be used in establishing sequences in the lives of individual potters. He was recognised by his fellow archaeologists as the supreme expert and consultant on the subject. His death on 26 April 2005 will thus be an inestimable loss to archaeology.

Brian Rodgerson Hartley was born in Chester, a city with a famous Roman pedigree, on the last day of 1929. His background was Methodist, the youngest of four children. At the age of seven, a school lesson about Roman Britain sparked his interest in archaeology. He won a scholarship to The King’s School, Chester, where he studied classics, developing a retentive memory and linguistic skills. His other interests ranged through cricket, walking, railways and philately. From 1946 he co-directed (with W. J. Williams) his first excavations at nearby Heronbridge, and published reports in 1946 and 1952, receiving help from Eric Birley with the samian. The ARA’s former Honorary President, the late Dr. Graham Webster, who became curator of the Grosvenor Museum (Chester) in 1948, remembered Brian’s enthusiastic interest. In that year Brian became closely involved in excavations directed by Graham and the late Sir Ian Richmond. He formed a lifelong friendship with Graham and, like him, was inspired and influenced by Richmond. In 1950, having completed his National Service with the RAF, he went up to Trinity Hall, Cambridge, to read the Natural Sciences Tripos. On gaining his degree he took the Diploma in Prehistoric Archaeology, and his academic career commenced.

His first appointment was as Professor Grahame Clark’s Research Assistant at Cambridge, where he lectured and supervised in Romano-British Archaeology, developing his style from Richmond. Brian wrote up and published (1957) a good report on the excavations at the Wandlebury Iron Age hillfort. He also continued work at Heronbridge and became involved with a wide group of archaeologists, among them Glyn Daniel, William (Bill) Frend, Roy Hodson, Ian Longworth and Ian Stead. His excavation reports, especially sections dealing with pottery, were even at this time, stage models of their kind.

It was in 1951 that Graham Webster encouraged Brian to join the activities of the famous Summer School at Great Casterton, Rutland, organised by Nottingham University’s Extra-Mural Department. Here he worked in close collaboration with Graham and with other influential teachers, especially Philip Corder, John Gillam and Maurice Barley, eventually, in 1958, joining the teaching staff as the samian expert. The complex site of Great Casterton includes a Roman town, fort and villa. It was also here that he met Katharine Kaine and they were married in 1955. Geoffrey Dannell reminds us that a photograph taken of Brian at Heronbridge shows him “fiercely gripping his beloved pipe, a rival for the late Basil Rathbone in the part of Sherlock Holmes.” This allusion is not casual. Like many archaeologists Brian found the logical deductive process of the classical English detective story basic to the interpretation of evidence and he was an aficionado of the genre. It is no wonder he accumulated an impressive collection of green *Penguins.*

In 1956 Brian was appointed Lecturer in Romano-British
Archaeology in the Department of Latin at Leeds University, succeeding William Wade. His courses attracted a good number of students, amongst them his future collaborator, Brenda Dickinson. His arrival in Yorkshire was marked by excavations at Ferry Fryston, Castleford and his work for Sheppard Frere on the samian from the excavations on the Roman city of Verulamium (Figs. 2 and 3). Brian would work through a production line of bags of samian at the Institute of Archaeology in London, in an atmosphere of pipe smoke and the aroma of black coffee. At this time he also took over the university’s training excavation at the Roman fort of Brough-by-Bainbridge, which continued for a further ten years, and in 1957 he was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London. His excavation of a pottery kiln at Stibbington, Hunts., led to a close friendship with Eric and Aileen Standen and the Peterborough Museum Society Field Club, and subsequently the much larger excavations at the Roman industrial small town of Durobrivae (Water Newton) in the Nene Valley, directed by Standen with Graham Webster and John Gillam. At Bainbridge, the 1960 season is remembered for Brian’s discovery of an important inscription on stone. In excavating the east gateway, he came across a large stone previously photographed in situ by Collingwood. Brian turned it over to reveal a dedicatory inscription to C. Valerius Pudens, a hitherto unknown Governor of Britain. In the excitement, moving it to the site hut, it fell and cracked

Brian’s toe. His reward was a massive plaster over his foot surrounded by a huge pot, and it was a long time before he lived down jokes about it. The next season produced another inscription, this time of the Cohors VI Nerviorum. Brian’s work in the Nene Valley also resulted in his publication, in 1960, of a type series of the distinctive Roman pottery industry of this region.

The following years proved very busy. He turned his attention to the Roman fort at Ilkley, Yorks., and a series of excavations at the samian production site of Lezoux in Central Gaul with Sheppard Frere where Brian also developed his reputation as a gourmet and bon vivant. Work continued in the Nene Valley at Castor and Stanground Park Farm. He also embarked on excavations with Frere at the Roman fort at Bowes in North Yorkshire in 1966 and in the following year Brian directed excavations at the Kirk Sink Roman villa site at Gargrave, West Yorkshire. Students and volunteers were impressed when he took time to carefully explain to all the results and interpretations of each day’s work at evening seminars. Throughout this period he was keen to propagate and encourage the publication of kiln-groups of local coarse pottery and became an enthusiastic supporter of Graham Webster’s brainchild, The Study Group for Romano-British Coarse Pottery.

After 1967 when Brian was promoted to Reader in the Department of Latin, he continued to excavate at Gargrave and was joined by Leon Fitts in the years 1974-5. In 1976 work started, with Leon Fitts, on the Roman fort of Lease Rig, and this collaboration also led to a book, The Brigantes, published in 1988. Brian published his important paper on The Roman occupations of Scotland: the evidence of samian ware in the journal Britannia (1972), which showed how the analysis of samian from sites could illustrate the history of the province as a whole.

After his first marriage was dissolved Brian married archaeologist Elizabeth Blank in 1973. He met her whilst carrying out research at the British Museum, where Elizabeth had been Kenneth Painter’s research assistant. Moving to York, they extensively renovated a fine eighteenth-century house, and had a son, Christopher, in 1977. Elizabeth has been Keeper of Archaeology and now Curator of the Constantine Project at the Yorkshire Museum since 1971. With John Wacher, Brian co-edited a Festschrift: Rome and her

In 1967 Brian began concentrating on ‘The Index’ of samian stamps which proved to be a huge endeavour. Archaeologists interested in Roman pottery will know that most forms of plain samian vessels normally have a potter’s stamp on the interior of the base (Fig. 3). Most were stamped with dies cut in reverse, so that the lettering would be viewed the right way round on the pot, although on occasion a positive die can result in a reverse (retrograde) stamp. Ligatured letters and abbreviations are normal, particularly after the name in referring to ‘made or manufactured by’ a particular potter or his factory. Most names are Celtic ones thinly disguised by Latin terminations. The value of these stamps in dating plain vessels is obvious, since the working life of a given potter was limited, although in some instances potters, of different dates, shared the same name and it needs expert care to separate and identify their stamps. On decorated samian the situation is more complicated, as some pots are un stamped or are stamped on the side within the decorated area (Fig. 4). Decorative details on stamped vessels can lead to the identification of un stamped vessels as the work of a particular potter or factory. Sometimes it is the mould which was initially stamped, or the pot when it was being finished after being taken out of the mould, so two bowls from the same mould might bear the stamps of different potters or factories. The stamps are sometimes on the rim and sometimes below the zone of decoration. On occasion the moulds are signed with a stylus. Up until the time of Brian’s major work the essential study of samian potters’ stamps drew largely on Felix Oswald’s pioneering: Index of Potters’ Stamps on Terra Sigillata (1931). However, this was published before some important samian kiln sites were discovered and before the tremendous growth of archaeological activity in post-war Europe when huge sites, including London with its thick Roman deposits, were partially rebuilt, thus offering new examples of historically dated strata. It was clear that a reassessment of Oswald’s work was indispensable to the early history of the western Roman Empire. Brian sought to pay close attention to the lettering, design and condition of the stamps, realising that each stamp was made by an individual die which degraded in the course of use.

The new project was designed to last twelve years with collection of data by Felicity Wild and Brenda Dickinson, and additional material provided by Katherine (Kay) Hartley who was also working on mortaria stamps. By 1975 the manuscript was one metre high, but the project was held up by the non-availability for study of the thousands of stamps from La Graufesenque in Southern Gaul. Another delaying factor was that Brian as ‘the expert’ was constantly being asked to analyse, date and write up finds of samian by excavating archaeologists and to share his information with them. His generosity in doing so turned out to be crucial in ensuring that so much useful data was accumulated. Most Romano-British archaeologists and even pottery specialists were content to let Brian do the work for them. He was the expert; he was the one with the knowledge and the years of experience. One recent result has been the 13-volume corpus of stamped and decorated bowls manufactured at La Graufesenque, published in 2004 by the Römisch-Germanisches Museum, Mainz.

Eventually, these delays enabled the whole project of ‘The Index’ to be transferred to digital media, thus making the corpus easier to revise as future evidence accumulated. Since Brian’s death Brenda Dickinson is continuing to work on ‘The Index’. This will reassure many that this great corpus will be readily available as a vital tool to scholars before too long. Many feel that completion of this unfinished work is the only fitting memorial to one of the outstanding academic archaeologists of his generation.

Away from his professional life Brian continued to develop his interests. These included baroque music, art and architecture, carpentry, food and wine, genealogy and criminology. He was also a gifted and entertaining story-teller. In 1981 he won the Sheldon Memorial Trust essay competition for a biographical and architectural study linked with his own and other houses in York. But it was his work on samian which made Brian Hartley ‘a legend in his own time’ amongst his peers and it is for this achievement that he will be remembered by Roman Archaeology in the future.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Geoffrey Dannell, Elizabeth Hartley, Joanna and David Bird, Brenda Dickinson, Martin Henig, Anthony King, Janet Senior and Bryn Walters for their help in compiling this appreciation. Obituaries appeared in The Times and The Independent newspapers in May 2005.
The years 2003 and 2004 saw a succession of attractive and extremely important Roman mosaics revealed for the first time in archaeological excavations in the south-west of England. All are almost certainly from rural villa settlements and are being investigated by a number of organisations.

Two of the most interesting sites are within a few miles of each other in South Gloucestershire, and were excavated or recorded by the same team, Grumbald’s Ash Archaeology Group (GAAG), co-directed by Rebecca Ireland, Andrew Jackson and Richard Osgood (see also ARA 16, pp. 14-15).

At Badminton Park the substantial house of a big estate has been revealed, containing a large apsidal chamber, first discovered in 2003 by Don Watts of the Badminton Park Estate and then fully excavated in 2004. All archaeological features were then recorded by GAAG before the site was reinstated. At the east end of the chamber, the apse was fronted by respond which may have supported an arch as several vousoirs were discovered in excavation. This was an extremely colourful and artistically impressive mosaic (Figs. 1 and 2). There was also a simple but elegant mosaic in a flanking corridor to the south (Fig. 3).

Geometric mosaics were, of course, common in Roman Britain and the same or similar designs and devices were employed and copied by mosaicists throughout the province. Nevertheless, what is remarkable about the large pavement at Badminton Park is that it employs motifs so far unique in mosaic anywhere. It is obvious that the room was designed to hold a stibadium, a curved dining couch.

The design in the apse is surrounded by a broad band of plain tessellation affording plenty of room for an impressive C-shaped couch to be placed on it and yet still leave room for about half of the fan-shaped radiant design to be seen by the diners (Fig. 4). A guilloche-bordered roundel shows where the circular table would have stood for their convenience. A wonderful illustration of such a stibadium may be seen on the illumination of Aeneas and Dido dining from the Vergilius Romanus (fol. 100v) in the Vatican Library (Fig. 5 and see also Weitzmann 1977, 56, pl. 56).

It is the device found in the roundel that is the most exciting feature of this floor (Fig. 6). One is used to the petalled rosettes used in this manner as on the newly excavated mosaic from the villa at Bradford on Avon, Wiltshire (see ARA 16 p. 11). What is remarkable here is that the normal petals have...
been turned into double leaves on shared Y-shaped stems. A variant of the same device appears in the lunettes at each end of the main rectangular section of the mosaic. This part of the floor also has an unusual design. The mosaicist has based the pattern on a conventional scheme of interlaced squares, but has tilted those in the corners and thereby enlivened the design. Bright patterned areas of blue and white chequer-work (Fig. 7) vie for attention with diamond-shaped panels containing another stylised and unique device extremely reminiscent of Jupiter’s thunderbolt (Fig. 8). This whole floor is remarkable. It is as though the mosaicist (who was obviously perfectly au-fait with conventional geometric designs) decided to completely break from slavish tradition and re-interpret motifs using the artist’s eye rather than the ruler. Artistically this is the most exciting geometric floor to have been discovered in Britain for many years.

On the other side of the flanking corridor with its simple mosaic, a trial trench dug in 2003 proved the existence of yet another mosaic. It seems quite likely that this villa had many mosaics in its heyday. Two more were discovered in 2004, some distance from the apsed room. The first was part of a very wide corridor which flanked the front of the building – probably a house of typical ‘winged corridor’ layout. It was neatly but robustly paved with large white tesserae and was simply but elegantly ornamented down the centre with a band of meander pattern bordered by thicker parallel lines of the same purple Pennant sandstone (Fig. 9). Another floor was discovered at right angles to this mosaic and may well represent the end of a cross-corridor. This was again of white tesserae with a central chequer-board pattern in grey. The site has now been scheduled as an Ancient Monument of national importance by English Heritage and reinstated; no further excavation is planned for the near future. The evidence from this trial excavation and particularly these splendid mosaics suggests that the villa was both large and impressive, and a fitting predecessor to Badminton House, nearby.

A few miles west of Badminton at Lower Woods Lodge, Hawkesbury Upton, excavations in 2004 by GAAG uncovered more of a large, but badly damaged mosaic of second-century style found in 2003. It is in a room in the building on the south-east side of the courtyard of the newly discovered Roman villa. At one end of the central panel of swastika meander was a narrow band of black triangles on a white ground surrounded by red bands. This in turn was bordered by a strand of guilloche which encircled the central area of the design. What was so unusual about this floor was the fact that the coarse purple Pennant sandstone borders appeared to be enlivened on the two excavated sides with some sort of ruined motif in white tesserae (Fig. 10). In itself this was most unusual, but the 2004 excavations proved that these were the remains of letters and that the borders had once carried a 30 cm
high inscription. This is unique in Britain. So far on the north side of the floor REG and part of an upright, possibly an I survives and what may be an R finishes it. Unfortunately the inscription was bisected and partially destroyed by the insertion of a later iron-smithing hearth. Only the top of the final letter exists and S and P have been suggested, but from the shape of the surrounding tessellation which is noticeably diagonally placed it seems as though this was to accommodate the front tail of an R. Dr. Roger Tomlin has suggested that if the final letter is an S, then the word could be the name REGINVS, a common cognomen, favoured in Celtic-speaking provinces; alternatively it is perhaps part of a literary quotation: REGIS(BUS)VI. The inscription was meant to be read by standing in the room, and looking towards the walls. Roger Tomlin and Mark Hassall feel that the letters are too bold to be a mosaicist’s signature, but may record the person(s) who commissioned the mosaic. The other fragment seen in 2003 seems to be the top part of a V. At the moment it seems that perhaps only one word was placed on each side of the mosaic floor.

Further excavations took place on the site in 2005 but no further letters were found. That two such neighbouring sites as Upton and Badminton Park should have produced such unusual mosaics is very intriguing. Their importance cannot be over-emphasised.

Another unusual mosaic discovery was made in 2003-2004 at Yarford in West Somerset during the Southern Quantock Archaeological Survey, led by Prof. Anthony King and Dr. Keith Wilkinson of the University of Winchester in conjunction with Somerset County Council. The site consists of a Roman villa overlying an earlier Iron Age and early Roman settlement site on the lower slopes of the Quantock Hills, commanding a spectacular view south over the Vale of Taunton Deane and to the Blackdown Hills beyond. The main house, terraced into the hillside, faces south and is made up of a row of four main rooms fronted by a long portico, with three rooms attached at the rear. There are no signs of corner towers, which would indicate a ‘winged-corridor’ plan. The mosaic floors a large bi-partite chamber made up of rooms D and E at the eastern end of the house in a building-phase belonging to the early to mid fourth century (Fig.11). What is therefore so interesting about this new discovery is that although the mosaic is dated to the fourth century, it has a design that may be inspired by second-century examples found at Verulamium and North Hill, Colchester (Camulodunum) (Neal, 1981, 71-72, mosaic No. 39, pl. 39). The main design (in Room D) is a nine-panelled grid of square and rectangular panels imposed over concentric circles of guilloche pattern, which surround a central panel bearing a cantharus of fourth-century type (Fig.12). It looks as if we have here a late Roman mosaic making use of an old design. There is no archaeological evidence that one is dealing with a copy of an earlier mosaic once on the site, or that the central panel replaced, as a repair, an earlier panel. This is one of the most westerly villas and mosaics in South-West Britain and, as Anthony King has pointed out, the design is unique in the West Country. At present, it is not clear whether this is a one-off mosaic, or laid by one of the local workshops, such as that based in Ilchester (Lindinis).

References:


Editorial Note:

We would like to thank Prof. Anthony
Roman Medicine
by Audrey Cruse.
Tempus Publishing, Stroud, 2004,
ISBN 0 7524 1461 5.
256 pp., 95 figures and
34 colour plates.

Review by Grahame Soffe

This book is accessible, well
illustrated and brilliantly brings
together the multi-faceted nature of
our western medical tradition with
its foundations established in
Classical Greece and later
transmitted throughout the Roman
Empire. Public and private health
and the prevention and cure of
injury and disease are matters that
remain so important for us today.

Here students of Roman
archaeology can examine this
fascinating but complex language,
including religious and magical
medicine, through the
enthusiastic eyes of an author possessing a rare
insight into medicine, and the
archaeological and literary evidence
for it from the ancient world.

As an introduction to the subject
this book has been welcomed by
many and none less than John
Scarborough, whose own book,
carrying the same title, appeared in
1969. Since then the subject of
Roman medicine has undergone a
rapid expansion in scholarship and
one is reminded of Ralph Jackson's
excellent Doctors and Diseases in the
Roman Empire (1988) which pulled
together many aspects and
elucidated the practice of medicine,
especially surgery. The value of this
new book is that it provides a
beautifully written synopsis of the
subject, covering an enormous field
with ease and grace, but at the same
time bringing into sharp focus the
wealth of evidence from Roman
Britain. But why Roman Britain?
Obviously there were provincial
variations throughout the Empire
but Romano-British studies are
now so advanced and accessible that
they can provide some of the best
evidence from the archaeological
record. It is important to encourage
this momentum. The literary texts
(which the author helpfully lists in
the most accessible English
translations), and the Roman army –
particularly in its provision of
'hospitals' in the frontier zones, help
to fill in many of the provincial
variations in medical practice.

The book is characterised by an
admirable blending of disparate
topics, conveniently parcelled up
under separate subject headings
within each chapter. In the
introduction we are at once put right
on the relationships and differences
between ancient and modern
medicine. The book is about ancient
medicine and not 'how nearly they
got it right' by comparisons with the
familiar concepts and practices of
the modern western world. Of

course we sometimes arrogantly
assume this to be the proper way to
practice human healing, forgetting
that we continue to witness the slow
processes of an evolving skill, an art,
a philosophy, and possibly a science.

We are introduced to some of the
great personalities of the Classical
and Hellenistic periods such as Plato,
Aristotle and the paramount god of
Greek medicine, Asclepius. In the
Imperial period we meet Pliny and in
the second century that Greek
master, Galen.

So the origins of Roman
medicine tend to lie in ancient
Greece, and in the first chapter we
are shown that in that world religion
pervaded every aspect of life and
society, particularly the field of
medicine. The sources range from a
wealth of texts to the healer-gods
and their sanctuaries in temple
complexes which survive as
archaeological sites with
architectural remains and numerous
votive artefacts filling museum
collections. These are only
comprehensible if we enter the
world of sacred sleep, dream
oracles, incubation and the abaton.

These seem irrational ways of
pursuing health and avoiding
disease to our 'western' way of
thinking, but still quite ordinary in
other parts of the world today. Greek
science and medicine is introduced

Fig. 12. Yarford: Detail of the cantharus
design in the centre of Room D.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.
through another gallery of personalities such as Herodotus, the Sophists, healers and schools of medicine. The origins of the Hippocratic Oath are explained and there are helpful sections on Egyptian and Hellenistic medicine.

What were the materials of medicine? Many seem almost immaterial in that they consisted of words which had a potent power through charms and incantations to have a therapeutic effect. Through archaeology we see this in inscribed amulets and lead tablets. Then there is the immense subject of the healing power of plants; their mind-altering effects and their analgesic properties have been exploited since earliest times. Much of the evidence comes from textual sources like the ‘Michigan Medical Codex’ but there are also the collyrium stamps which were used for making impressions on sticks of dried portable eye salve, and give prescriptions for diseases and infections of the eye. The evidence of the ‘Villa Vesuvio’ near Pompeii, a farm where storage vats were found to contain deposits of ‘medical’ plant seeds preserved in waterlogged conditions, and the formal garden at the Fishbourne palace, are two examples which remind us that archaeology can and will produce the data we are looking for.

Of course, Roman buildings are a constant reminder of an interest in health and hygiene, and Roman Britain displays urban and military centres with public baths, aqueducts, latrines and sewers, as much as any other province. A sufficiency of clean water has always been the most basic requirement for good health and human survival. Continued interest in this subject has been recently demonstrated by a conference on Roman water supply held at York in April 2006. In contrast to this, the research into the contents of faecal matter from cesspits at the Bearsden fort, for example, confirms that intestinal parasites and afflictions were present as much as in recent times. This reviewer found the discussions on baths rather brief in view of how much is still to be learnt on how and why these establishments operated in public and private contexts, although, the healing baths at Bath receive more attention (see below). This is made up for by the interesting discussion of the thorny subject of the ‘hospital’ or *valetudinarium* building postulated from the archaeological remains of forts and fortresses. Has the archaeological evidence for them been found? Are the large buildings identified as ‘hospitals’ or sick-bays at Nuess, Xanten and Inchtuthil, to quote the most impressive examples, really what they are made out to be? The presence of a few surgical instruments may not be sufficient evidence of function. Perhaps the evidence from the ‘strength report’ from the Vindolanda Tablets and the mention of Marcus the *medicus* and Vitalis the *seplastarius* (pharmacist) is more reliable, but it is salutory to learn that there is no unequivocal evidence from any site to prove the existence of a ‘hospital’ building anywhere.

The subject of Roman diseases and healing is dealt with in two chapters on ‘cult’ and ‘medicaments, cauteries and operations’. The sheer number of healing sanctuaries throughout the Empire (many associated with mineral springs) is mind-boggling and the author chooses to treat only two examples in detail, Nemi and Ponte di Nona, in Italy. Here there is an interesting discussion on the deities who empowered these shrines, and the nature and purpose of the anatomical votives and ex-votos offered at such establishments. This is a fascinating subject of which large numbers of the objects themselves, such as portrait heads, breasts, genitalia and utei, can present a vivid reality as archaeological artefacts. The evidence from such sites in Gaul and Britain is treated in more detail, and there is an interesting discussion of the shrine of the Gallo-Roman goddess Sequana at the Source-de-la-Seine with its hundreds of wooden and stone sculptures and votive metal eyes and torsos. The temple complex of Nodens at Lydney, with its guest house, baths and *abaton* is discussed in more detail and its plan compared to the Aesculapian